



**C2D – Centre for Research on Direct Democracy
ZDA - Zentrum für Demokratie Aarau
University of Zurich**

C2D Working Paper Series

Romania:

Country Report

Irina CULIC

Irina Culic

**Romania:
Country Report**

**C2D Working Paper Series
3/2000**

C2D – Centre for Research on Direct Democracy

Irina Culic

Romania:
Country Report

C2D Working Paper Series
3/2000

C2D – Centre for Research on Direct Democracy
ISSN 1662-8152

<http://www.c2d.ch>

ABSTRACT

Unlike the other East-Central European countries, where the transition from communist rule to democracy was the result of peaceful movements or negotiations around a round table, Romania experienced a violent change of regime. The last communist ruler, Nicolae Ceausescu, was removed from his sultanistic position by a popular uprising. The step towards a democratic regime expressed the will of huge masses of people that demonstrated in all important cities of the country and in almost all localities. The present political system in Romania may be described as a representative democracy, governed by the directly elected President and Parliament (semi-presidential system), according to the provisions of the new Constitution.

CONTENT

1. Provisions of Constitution regarding subject-matters of referendums and popular initiative	1
2. Other laws regarding direct democracy	2
3. Subject-matters of popular votes	2
4. Techniques and procedures for popular votes	4
5. Plebiscites and referendums	4
6. Forms of government and referendum	5
7. Participation and turnout	6
8. Influence of political parties, movements and other pressures groups on direct democracy.....	9
9. Regional and local experiences	12

-
- 1. Provisions of Constitution regarding subject-matters of referendums and popular initiative**
 - 2. Other laws regarding direct democracy**
 - 3. Subject-matters of popular votes**
 - 4. Techniques and procedures for popular votes**
 - 5. Plebiscites and referendums**
 - 6. Forms of government and referendum**
 - 7. Participation and turnout**
 - 8. Influence of political parties, movements and other pressures groups on direct democracy**
 - 9. Regional and local experiences**

Direct democracy: country-report on Romania

Irina Culic

Unlike the other East-Central European countries, where the transition from communist rule to democracy was the result of peaceful movements or negotiations around a round table, Romania experienced a violent change of regime. The last communist ruler, Nicolae Ceausescu, was removed from his sultanistic position by a popular uprising. The step towards a democratic regime expressed the will of huge masses of people, that demonstrated in all important cities of the country and in almost all localities.

The present political system in Romania may be described as a representative democracy, governed by the directly elected President and Parliament (semi-presidential system), according to the provisions of the new Constitution.

The Romanian Constitution

The new Romanian Constitution was adopted by referendum, on December 8, 1991. On a turnout of 66%, 53% voted in favour of the new constitution.

1. Provisions of Constitution regarding subject-matters of referendums and popular initiative

According to Article 72, paragraph 3, line (c), the organization and fulfilling of the referendum is regulated through organic law.¹

Article 73 on legislative initiative provides that: Legislative initiative belongs to:

- the Government
- every member of the Parliament
- at least 250,000 citizens entitled to vote (coming from at least 1/ 4 of the counties, and at least 10,000 signatures per county or the city of Bucharest).

Article 90 provides that: «The President of Romania, after consulting the Parliament, may ask the people to express its will, through referendum, in matters of national interest.»

¹ The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate adopted in February 22, 1999, the Law regarding the organization and fulfilling of the referendum, that was advanced for promulgation to the President of Romania. On April 2, 1999, the president asked the Constitutional Court to analyze the constitutionality of a number of the provisions of this law. The Constitutional Court, in the debate held on May 5, 1999, decided that a part of these provisions were unconstitutional and sent the decision to the presidents of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate, in order to start the procedure of re-examination of the law. The law was not re-examined and re-formulated until the present date.

Article 95 provides that: The president may be suspended, in case of severe break of law, by the Parliament, through a decision taken by majority, after having asked the advice of the Constitutional Court. The suspension of the president has to be proposed by at least 1/3 of the number of deputies and senators. If the dismissal proposal is approved, in a maximum of 30 days there is organized a referendum for the dismissal of the President.

Article 146 provides that: The revision of the Constitution may be initiated:

- by the President of Romania at the proposal of the Government;
- by at least 1/ 4 of the deputies or of the senators;
- by at least 500,000 citizens entitled to vote (coming from at least 1/ 2 of the counties, and at least 20,000 signatures per county or the city of Bucharest).

Article 147 provides that: The proposal or project of revision of the Constitution must be adopted by Parliament with majority of at least 2/3 of the number of members of each House, or at least 3/ 4 of all members of Parliament (after the procedure of median), gathered in common meeting. The revision is final after being approved through referendum, organized in a maximum of 30 days after the adoption of the proposal/ project of revision.

2. Other laws regarding direct democracy

The Decree-Law for the election of the Parliament and of the President of Romania

Article 3: «The Parliament of Romania, constituted of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, as well as the President of Romania, are elected by universal, equal, direct and secret, freely expressed vote.»

The Law of local public administration

Article 5: «The authorities of public administration, fulfilling the local autonomy in communes and cities are the local councils, functioning as deliberative authorities, and the mayors, functioning as executive authorities. [...]»

Article 13: «The councils of communes and cities are constituted of councilors elected through universal, equal, direct secret and freely expressed vote, under the conditions of the law regarding the local elections.»

3. Subject-matters of popular votes.

As stated in Constitution, the national referendum represents the form and means of direct consulting and expression of the sovereign will of the Romanian people in the following matters:

- a) problems of national interest
- b) dismissal of the President
- c) revision of the Constitution

on a). What may represent «problems of national interest»? Several suggestions were given by the debates in the public sphere:

i). One of the problems that qualified for this category was the *ratification of the Treaty with Ukraine*. In an interview, the President Constantinescu of Romania said that «if the masses did not get out in the streets to manifest against the Treaty with Ukraine, any subsequent critiques is senseless». Former foreign affairs minister Adrian Severin argued that lack of challenge did not mean acceptance of a certain political solution, and this should have required a referendum. (See article in Lumea to be found on Internet at <http://www.lumeam.ro/049952.html>, in Romanian).

ii). Senator PAUR (Party of the Alliance for Romanian Unity) Costica Ciurtin (nationalist orientation) argued against the *set up of a university with Hungarian language as a teaching language*. He asserted that this decision should be taken as a result of a referendum. (See e.g. newspaper «Stirea», Sept 26, 1998)

iii). The mayor of the city Cluj-Napoca, Gheorghe Funar, secretary general of Greater Romania Party and former president of the Party for the Romanian National Unity (both of nationalist orientation) sent an open letter to the President of Romania in January 27, 1999. Complaining of the activity of the Parliament, in what concerned the sanctions towards the president of the Greater Romania Party and the possibility to ban the party, and of the bad government of the coalition in power, he expressed the opinion that «the Romanian people should express through referendum its will regarding the organization of anticipated elections, in May 1999.» If not, «the President Emil Constantinescu assumes the responsibility for the continuation of the process of ruination of the country and for the rise of social conflicts, with unpredictable consequences.» (See e.g. newspaper «Stirea», January 28, 1999)

on c). Initiatives for the revision of the Constitution.

i). There existed fervent debates regarding the revision of the Constitution in what concerned *the parliamentary immunity* (with respect to the senator Corneliu Vadim Tudor). According to the Constitution, «a deputy or a senator may not be arrested, searched or sent on trial, criminal or civil, without the agreement of the Chamber of Deputies, respectively of the Senate, after having been organized hearings on the matter». There existed various proposals for the revision of the Constitution, including the one that proposed the organization of a referendum to decide on this matter.

The popular belief (and probably an ordinary practice among certain Romanian politicians) is that members of Parliament take advantage of their position to avoid criminal or civil charges and trials. (The case of Corneliu Vadim Tudor is notorious. Among accusations against him were slander and calumny in mass media, including of President of Romania.) (See Romanian press, May-June 1998)

ii). Another public debate regarded the possibility of revising the Constitution *in the matter of the form of government*. Certain monarchist groups would have liked to see King Michael 1 back on the

throne of Romania. Even the civic alliance that introduced and supported Mr. Emil Constantinescu in his political trajectory expressed public sympathy towards the former king. Certain public personalities suggested that there should be held a referendum regarding this issue. (See the Declaration of President Emil Constantinescu regarding the situation of King Mihai, on January 3, 1998; on Internet <http://info.fx.ro/emil/docs/biroul-de-presa/980103.html>, in Romanian)

4. Techniques and procedures for popular votes.

According to the Constitution, the referendum may be proposed by:

- a) - the President of Romania
 - b) - at least 1/3 of the number of deputies and senators
 - c) - the President of Romania at the proposal of the Government;
 - at least 1/4 of the deputies or of the senators;
 - at least 500,000 citizens entitled to vote (coming from at least 1/2 of the counties, and at least 20,000 signatures per county or the city of Bucharest).
- a) The president of Romania is the only one entitled to decide what represents «problems of national interest» on which he may ask the people to express its will through referendum.² (See Article 90)
- b) The referendum for the dismissal of the President must be organized in a maximum of 30 days after the dismissal proposal is approved. (See Article 95)
- c) The referendum for the revision of the Constitution must be organized in a maximum of 30 days after the adoption of the proposal/ project of revision by the Parliament. (See Article 147)

5. Plebiscites and referendums.

The only referendum organized and held in Romania after December 1989 was for the adoption of the Constitution.

One of the main issues debated, in what concerned the provisions of the Constitution, was exactly the form of government: kingdom (proposed by a part of the opposition) or republic. Linked with this, there were arguments about how the questions should be formulated in the ballot, that is, whether there should be a separate referendum regarding the form of government. The supporters of the republic said that if the Constitution had been voted, then this would have also included the vote for

² The Law regarding the organization and fulfilling of the referendum contained an Article providing that «the President may propose to the Parliament to pronounce on matters of national interest», and was found unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, which argued that the President may propose this «to the people», and not to the Parliament, even if the Parliament has to be previously consulted. The provision was understood by the Constitutional Court as a limitation of the rights of the President.

the form of government, since Article 1 of the Constitution, paragraph 2, provided that the form of government of the Romanian state was the republic.

Another issue discussed during the public debates regarding the new Constitution in December 1991 concerned the problem of who was entitled to candidate for a seat in the Parliament. A number of civic organizations and political parties demanded that the Constitution should state that holders of positions in the structures of the former Romanian Communist Party and the communist state should not be allowed to compete in elections.

The problem raised by representatives of the Hungarian minority regarded Article 1 of the Constitution, paragraph 1: «Romania is a national [...] state.» They claimed that Romania can not be a national state, since it comprised more than one nationality.

As a result, the Constitution was adopted with a majority of only 53% (of a turnout of 66%). If we make a simple calculus, this means that only 35% of the qualified citizens approved the text of the Constitution.

Related with what was said previously, one of the problems of the national referendums may be the turnout. For a more «convincing» expression of the popular will, there could be required that the vote in national referendums is mandatory for all qualified citizens. In case of a ratio of non-voters approaching the 50% threshold, the majority rule may be impaired by abstention; thus, the legitimacy of the results may be questionable, even if the majority rule is formally upheld.

6. Forms of government and referendums.

The referendum for the adoption of the Constitution, organized in December 1991, had an enormous stake, since it represented the act of legitimization of the form of government. As mentioned above, one of the most debated issues, during the discussions of the provisions of the Constitution, was the form of government.

The high abstention recorded at the referendum for the adoption of the Constitution (34%), when compared to the turnout in the elections of 1990 (86.2%), was the result of a more or less implicit recommended political tactic, by that part of the politicians and political parties who were against the respective formulation of the Constitution.

According to the Constitution, the citizens may propose the organization of a referendum only for the revision of the Constitution. The provisions of the Constitution in this respect require an important mobilization of the citizens (see above). Taking into account the fragmentation and cleavages of the present-day Romanian society, as well as the weak organization of the civil society, there is very little chance that such an event will take place.

Another aspect of the organization of referendums, in order to consult the will of the public, is the costs implied by such a process. For example, there was much criticized the resignation of the mayor

of Bucharest, Victor Ciorbea, (who simultaneously resigned from the position of prime-minister) in 1998, because of the big costs implied by the organization of local by-elections.

Nevertheless, one can say that many Romanian politicians consider that referendum is not «an efficient practice for the act of government» and «is contrary to a real democratic spirit». (See Adrian Severin's article above) It was never used in Romania after 1989, except for the adoption of the Constitution.

7. Participation and turnout.

One of the forms of political participation is the vote in local and general elections. The turnout in the three general elections held in Romania after 1989 was the following:

Table 1. Turnout in general elections, Romania 1990, 1992, 1996.

	1990	1992	1996
parl. & pres. 1 st round	86.2	76.3	76.0
pres. 2 nd round	-	69.9	75.9

Source: Monitorul oficial al României.

As one can notice, the turnout in the first free elections after the change of regime was very high. Probably this high mobilization was motivated by the occasion of a free vote, for the first time after a long period of implicit «compulsory» vote. Nevertheless, the lack of political culture and exercise of democracy, the lack of information, the distrust in historical or newly formed political parties, and the political games of the National Salvation Front (NSF), who benefited of the symbolic capital of the Revolution in December 1989, produced results looking much like the communist «unanimous» votes: Ion Iliescu obtained 85.07% of the votes (out of 3 candidates), while the NSF obtained 66.31%. (The ethnic Hungarian party, Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, obtained 7.23% - equal to the proportion of Hungarians within the electorate. The only other party that obtained more than 3% of the votes was the National Liberal Party - 6.41%).

The analysis of turnout, in 1996 general elections, the first round, by geographic-economic-social areas, shows that there were important differences among them, correlated with the level of economic development, demographic and ethnic structure, level of unemployment etc.

Table 2. Average turnout by geographic-economic-social areas, general elections 1996.

Area	Counties comprised	Average turnout
1	Botosani, Neamt, Suceava	77.6
2	Galati, Iasi	74.1
3	Bacau, Vaslui	74.7
4	Arges, Dâmbovita, Prahova, Ialomita	73.1
5	Buzau, Braila	77.8
6	Giurgiu, Teleorman, Ilfov, Calarasi, Vrancea	69.2
7	Olt, Dolj, Mehedinti	68.5
8	Gorj, Vâlcea	66.8
9	Tulcea, Constanta	76.2
10	Alba, Hunedoara	76.8
11	Brasov, Sibiu	80.9
12	Cluj, Mures	80.5
13	Covasna, Harghita	83.9
14	Bistrita, Salaj	78.0
15	Maramures, Satu-Mare	72.8
16	Arad, Bihor	75.1
17	Timis, Caras-Severin	76.4
18	Municipality of Bucharest	78.4
Total		75.3

Source: electronic data set of the author, based on valid votes and population structure by counties, as reported by the National Commission for Statistics, Romania.

The turnout was lowest in the most economically undeveloped areas (area 8, also area 6). The highest rate of vote was registered in the counties with a majority of Hungarian population (Harghita - 84.72% Hungarians at 1992 census, and a turnout of 84.8%, respectively Covasna - 75.24% Hungarians, turnout of 92.9%). The Hungarian population is much more disciplined than the Romanian one; also, in the 1996 presidential elections, a Hungarian candidate competed for the presidency. High turnouts were registered in the more economically developed areas, with a relative low rate of unemployment. Bucharest also registered a higher rate of turnout than the country average.

The intention to vote is also closely linked with the *level of trust in political parties and personalities*. The data in the Public Opinion Barometer suggest that as the trust in the President, Government and Parliament decreases, the number of undecided or not intending to vote increases.

All the surveys done in 1999 consistently returned a rate of undecided or non-voters between 40 and 45%. If in 1996 there existed important differences among regions, in what concerned the turnout, the discontent with the new government (constituted from former opposition parties) and the constantly deteriorating economic and social situation of the country generalized. Many people have the feeling that there is no party or political coalition able to properly govern the country.

Table 3. Profile of non-voters and undecided.

Variable	Categories	Non-voters & undecided	Whole sample
Gender	Male	43.4	48.8
	Female	56.6	51.2
Ethnic group	Romanians	90.1	90.0
	Hungarians	7.2	8.0
	Others	6.7	2.0
Age	18-34	30.1	29.2
	35-54	35.4	38.1
	55+	34.5	32.7
Education	Low	44.5	39.6
	Medium	38.2	42.4
	High	17.4	17.9
Type of locality	>200,000	24.0	23.4
	100,000-200,000	10.1	8.7
	30,000-100,000	12.4	12.9
	<30,000	9.3	9.6
	Rural localities	44.2	45.4
Area	Bucharest	9.0	9.0
	Banat	6.9	5.6
	Crisana-Maramures	8.9	8.2
	Dobrogea	6.2	5.5
	Moldova	20.6	21.2
	Muntenia	21.4	19.6
	Oltenia	9.0	10.8
	Transilvania	18.1	19.9

From a sample of 2074 subjects, 858 (41.4%) declared that they would not go to vote or that they were undecided.

The above table shows in a synthetic manner the profile of the category of non-voters and undecided. In the same table there are the corresponding figures for the whole sample used in the analysis. The data came from the latest Public Opinion Barometer done by Metro Media Transilvania at the request of the Foundation for an Open Society in May 1999. There was used a representative multi-cluster random sample of 2074 subjects. The clusters were based on cultural area, type of locality, and level of economic development.³

It can be noticed that women are in a greater degree than men non-voters and undecided. This also correlated with education, where we can notice that the best-represented category among non-voters and undecided is the low educated. The younger generations, as well as those over 55, tend to be non-voters and undecided. There are also differences in what concerns the cultural areas: the more developed, the more undecided or non-voter.

Nevertheless, though statistically significant, the differences are not great among different categories of subjects. The lack of trust and dissatisfaction with the performance of the Government, Parliament and political parties is general.

A case study of the local by-elections in Bucharest, 1998, when there was needed an extra round because the results could not be validated due to abstention (less than 50% of the electorate went to vote), shows a decreasing interest in the electoral activity. The situation in Bucharest could be easily generalized for the whole country. The increasing discontent in the performance of the authorities (administrative or governmental), the continuing decline in the quality of life, the lack of trust in politicians and political parties were the main causes of the low mobilization.

8. Influence of political parties, movements and other pressure groups on direct democracy.

Influence of political parties

One of the most active parties in the political field is the Hungarian party, The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR). Functioning as an organization fighting for the preservation of the identity of Hungarians in Romania, as well as for most possible cultural and political rights and autonomy of the Hungarian minority in Romania, rather than a genuine political party, DAHR had a number of initiatives regarding the change of the laws of local public administration and of education. Together with the German Democratic Forum in Romania and the Democratic Alliance of the Slovaks and Czechs in Romania, DAHR protested against the form of the Law of Education. UDMR had a legislative initiative in regard with this law.

The Bill on the Native-Language Education of Minorities was submitted to the Senate in September 1994. The Parliament ignored the bill, which did not get into the agenda, though the Constitutional Court decided that this initiative, backed by 492,380 signatures, was constitutional.

³ Data set and information on the survey on Internet at the following address: <http://www.osf.ro/pob/>

According to the Constitutional Court's explanation, it took almost one year for the Ministry of Interior to verify less than 200,000 signatures collected by DAHR. Nevertheless, the Bill proposed by DAHR did not enter the agenda of the Parliament so far.

Another initiative belongs to the Liberal National Party, for the revision of the Constitution, requiring that the Romanian state should guarantee the private property, not only «protect» it, as provided in the Constitution. The difference is more than semantic, particularly when taken into account the previous communist practices of expropriation. It is no coincidence that in parallel with this legislative initiative there are taking place ardent debates in the Parliament in what concerns the law of the restitution of the private property confiscated by the former communist state.

Influence of pressure groups: the unions

One of the issues debated by the intellectual elite and former communist opponents after December 1989 and especially after the first general elections in May 20, 1990 and during the elaboration of the Constitution, was the problem of denying members in the former structures of the Romanian Communist Party and the communist state to run for position in the Parliament or to hold public, official positions (known as Point 8 of the Proclamation in Timisoara). One of the hinted persons was exactly the elected president, Ion Iliescu, but there were many others pointed at. These debates transformed into the «University Square Phenomenon»: continuous manifestations against the new regime. The movement ended when miners from Jiu Valley mobilized (allegedly President Iliescu mobilized them) to come to Bucharest and fought the demonstrators. Subsequently President Iliescu publicly thanked miners for defending the state of law.

Nevertheless, another «mineriad» was the cause of the fall of the Petre Roman government in September 1991. In the following years, miners threatened to come to Bucharest a number of times, whenever their requests were not accomplished. Formerly privileged social category, symbolically representing the rule of the working class, the miners could not adjust to the conditions of the new system. The 1990-1992 and 1992-1996 governments practiced a populist policy towards the disastrous mining industry, in an effort to keep a good relation with this social category and the unions representing it, despite the huge losses it produced.

In a number of other occasions the first two governments gave up the initiation of economic reforms because of pressures of unions in various industries.

The regime established after 1996 promised rapid privatization, close down of failure industry, return of illegally taken former property. Though initially largely supported by the people, the government coalition, torn by conflicting interests, did not manage to keep these promises. The period of time after the investiture of the new government witnessed many union movements and in many occasions gave up to their requests.

The government became firmer as the economic situation and international credibility of Romania decreased dramatically. Thus, the last «mineriad» in February 1999, started when prime-minister refused to go in Jiu Valley for talks with miners, was stopped by armed force.

Civil society

Understood in the terms of Habermas as public aggregation of citizens against the state, debating issues of public interest, the civil society in Romania was and continuous to be rather non-existent in post-communist Romania. There were formed few civic groups (such as The Civic Alliance or The Group for Social Dialogue) and their discourse did not penetrated to the masses. Exercising an elitist position, pretending to be the holders of universal truth and the only defenders of democratic values, these groups produced rather hostile feelings from the part of most social categories, unaccustomed with the values and exercise of democracy.

In initiative worth mentioning was that of Club 200, regarding the rights of sexual minorities. According to the law, any homosexual act was illegal and was to be prosecuted and punished. Nevertheless, the change in the respective legislation came as a result of international pressures, and not of the efforts of this internal movement.

Mass media (television)

Almost all the period after December 1989, the public television supported the parties in government and presented the information favorable to them. Competing private televisions were set up in Romania, but being broadcast by cable, their coverage fails to reach rural areas.

We have to mention that the Law of audio-visual prescribes the membership of the National Council of audio-visual according to political precepts, thus influencing the general orientation of these institutions (radio, television).

It is obvious that the televised debates between the candidates in the second round of the presidential elections, 1996, had a great impact on the voters and had a main contribution for the final outcome. Those debates were organized both by the state television and private (commercial) televisions.

Freedom of press is guaranteed by both the Constitution and the Law on Audio-Visual (May 1992). The Constitution, along with the Penal Code prohibits «the defamation of the country» without clearly specify the types of activities referred to by this term. This might be used to restrict the freedom of the press. Under Iliescu Government there were reports of frequently using licensing, official audits, tax codes, tariffs and control of newsprint supplies to apply pressure on opposition media. According to the new amendments to the Penal Code (Law 140/ 1996) there is no difference between journalists and other categories of people in terms of their actions. Penalties are up to two years imprisonment for libel and up to five years for disseminating false information if the action had

repercussion on Romania's international relations or national security. Several politicians have brought charges of slander against local journalists. One well known case is that of a local journalist in Cluj-Napoca, who expressed his opinion about the fact that mayor Funar had organized a so called »burial of the peace and liberty of Romanians«, after there had been signed the treaty of friendship between Hungary and Romania. The journalist was fined a high amount of money which he refused to pay; there were organized demonstrations in support of the respective journalist.

Although the news media are in theory editorially independent, many of them heavily slant their news reporting. Often, the media outlets are owned by people involved in politics and this influences their orientation.

Public opinion surveys

Serving the main aim of informing society and politicians, public opinion surveys are relatively frequent in Romania. There are done periodical surveys within the program «Public Opinion Barometer» of the Foundation for an Open Society, as well as others, fulfilled by various institutes for social research and public opinion studies. In general politicians and political parties take into account the results of the surveys in their political actions. Nevertheless, a number of them challenged the results, when negative in what they were concerned, and accused the executioners of incompetence or fraud.

One of the latest issues on which was questioned the public opinion was the attitude of the citizens towards the Serbs during the war in Kosovo. The people disagreed with the decision of the Romanian government to let NATO overfly the Romanian territory and use its airports. Also, the support for NATO decreased considerably. Some journalists and public figures expressed the idea that there should have been organized a national referendum on this matter.

9. Regional and local experiences.

As mentioned before, the dissatisfaction with the performance of the government, Parliament and political parties and the trust in political institutions severely decreased. In most local by-elections organized in 1998 (including the capital Bucharest) was registered an abstention that invalidated a number of rounds for the election of the mayors.

In what concerns the relation of the citizens with the local authorities and the influence they feel they have on the decisions taken at local level, here are some results taken from the Public Opinion Barometer, May 1999:

Asked if they can influence local decisions, 40.2% of the subjects answered that in a very low degree or at all, and 35.9% that in a low degree. Thus, 76.1% of the subjects believe that their influence on decisions taken at local level is low and very low.

In what concerns the trust in the institution of mayoralty, 52.9 of the subjects said that they have very low or low trust. As for the trust in the mayor, 51.4 % of the subjects said that they have very low or low trust.

The active participation in influencing decisions is given by the answers to a number of questions regarding their taking part in demonstrations, strikes, signing letters of protest or contacting authorities:

Table 4. Active involvement in decision-making.

Form of participation	% yes	% no
Took part in demonstrations after 1989	10.5	87.6
Took part in strikes after 1989	11.5	86.7
Signed a letter of protest after 1989	9.7	88.3
Contacted authorities after 1989	16.9	80.8

Source: Public Opinion Barometer, November 1998, at the request of the Foundation for an Open Society, done by Metro Media Transilvania.

One can notice that the population believes it does not have a significant say in the decisions taken at local level. The attitude towards local administration and local government is of distrust. People feel that the local administration and local government are unwilling or unable to satisfy their requests or wishes. In what concerns the figures in the above table, it is hard to say whether the figures are low or not. It is though significant that people do take part in such events.

In our knowledge, there has never been organized a referendum at local level, that respected all the legal procedures. However, especially in rural areas or small localities, there often take place popular consultations, where are discussed public matters and are made decisions affecting the whole population.

There also were cases when different political personalities suggested that the public will should be consulted in taking decisions affecting the local population. Here is such an example. The local authorities in the city of Arad were taken by surprise by the announcement that the Government decided to set up a reconciliation (between Romanian and Hungarians) park in the city, following the implementation of the agreement between the prim-ministers of Romania and Hungary.. The mayor declared that he did not know where this park would be set up, and the vice-mayor said that he did not know what was the meaning of a «reconciliation park». The president of the local branch of the Party for the Romanian National Unity declared: «The Government takes decision that affect the people from Arad above the local authorities. this fact breaks the principle of local autonomy, advanced by the present power. O believe that the opinion of people from Arad should be expressed through a referendum, and the local government should take more into account the interests of the city».

(See Stirile Virtual Arad, September 11, 1999, on Internet at http://virtual.arad.ro/news/1999/va_n110999_20.htm, in Romanian)